

Kansas Association of Local Health Departments (KALHD)

2025 Policy Statement

Public Health in Kansas

The environments where people live, learn, work, and play have a profound impact on health. Healthier individuals contribute more effectively to the workforce, strengthen families, improve communities, and help shape the future of society. Public health professionals strive to create and implement policies that ensure access to nutritious food, safe and affordable housing, clean air and water, opportunities for physical activity, quality education, safe workplaces, and accessible healthcare for all.

Such policies can boost workforce productivity by reducing absenteeism and increasing people's ability to stay in the workforce as they age. They also help reduce healthcare costs for both private and public payers, promote financial independence, and decrease reliance on public resources. Ultimately, this strengthens the economy, helps children to thrive, and enhances the prosperity of every Kansan.

The Kansas Association of Local Health Departments (KALHD) hope to work with like-minded leaders in business, government, philanthropy, advocacy, and individual citizens to encourage our elected officials to be purposeful in the adoption of policies that support public health.

Policy Priorities

- 1) Sustain State Funding for Laboratory Courier Services.** We request the Kansas Legislature sustain funding for essential local laboratory courier services provided by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE). Elimination of these services would shift the cost for shipment of samples to the KDHE laboratory in Topeka to the local level. Courier services support city and rural water districts, the Kansas Departments of Corrections and Transportation, hospitals, reservoirs, and businesses; not just local health departments. All Kansas taxpayers are paying for the newly constructed KDHE laboratory in Topeka, and this state-funded courier service ensures equitable access for all 105 counties. The KDHE courier relieves the burden of expensive, untimely, or unavailable services from commercial shipping companies (ex. FedEx, UPS, etc.) in our smallest communities.
- 2) Financial Support for Local Public Health.** We support increased funding, both state and federal, for public health services that strengthen the public health system and improve the health of Kansans. America's Health Rankings 2023 Annual Reportⁱ ranked Kansas 29th in terms of health outcomes. A ranking that has slipped from 8th in 1991. Many factors contribute to this ranking, and among them is Kansas' modest level of investment in governmental public health compared to other states in which we are below average (average \$55.65/person and Kansas \$31.74/person in 2023) and 34th lowest in per capita spendingⁱⁱ. We also support revising K.S.A. 65-242 to incorporate the multi-year budget proviso language that increases the base amount of funding to each local health department from \$7,000 to \$12,000.
- 3) Medicaid Expansion.** We join with the majority of our fellow Kansans in support for expansion of the Kansas Medicaid program. In a survey of Kansans conducted in the fall of 2024ⁱⁱⁱ, almost seventy percent (72.4%) of respondents supported expanding Medicaid, while only 8.7% did not. In another survey^{iv}, 68% of registered voters, 51% of Republican primary voters and 83% of small business owners, favored expanding Medicaid in Kansas. Further, Kansas and nine other States' failure to provide these services for their citizens, contributes to The United States being the only nation among the 37 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations^v that does not have universal healthcare. Kansas must not continue to lag behind our peer states, and the world, in reducing the costs of healthcare and protecting citizens from medical debt. Expansion will support a healthier workforce and make our state more economically competitive, while preserving & strengthening rural healthcare by providing uniform access to affordable healthcare for all Kansans.
- 4) Communicable Disease & Vaccination.** Vaccines have reduced or eliminated many diseases that once killed or seriously harmed infants, children, and adults. We oppose increasing allowable exemptions, which leads to decreased vaccination rates and poses a significant risk to the health and well-being of Kansans. In addition, we support a review of the existing exemptions and those that pose significant risk to the public's health being repealed. We also oppose efforts to shift immunization decision-making from public health medical professionals or other steps designed to eliminate immunization regulations or requirements.

Additional Policy Statements

Substance Misuse and Behavioral Health. The growing challenges of substance misuse and untreated mental illness pose significant threats to public health, communities, and the economy, requiring immediate action. Substance misuse can lead to higher rates of overdose deaths, infectious diseases like HIV and hepatitis, and long-term physical and mental health issues; all of which strain healthcare systems. Communities suffer from increased crime rates, homelessness, and family instability as individuals face untreated addiction and mental illness. Economically, the impact is seen through lost productivity, higher healthcare costs, and increased burdens on social services and law enforcement. Substance misuse contributes to chronic health problems when left untreated. Recent investments by the Kansas Legislature are commendable, but continued and expanded funding is essential. This includes support for both community-based and inpatient crisis stabilization, treatment services like medically assisted treatment (MAT), and innovative solutions for local governments to reduce abuse and improve overall health outcomes. Investment in education and training is also crucial for effective prevention, harm reduction and treatment strategies.

Climate Change and Clean Environment. The environment directly impacts public health. Contaminated water can lead to serious illnesses, while poor air quality contributes to asthma and cardiovascular problems. Climate change worsens these issues, as rising temperatures increase heatwaves and ground-level ozone formation, further harming vulnerable populations. Changing precipitation patterns also heighten flooding and drought risks, contaminating drinking water and increasing the spread of waterborne diseases. Lead exposure, especially in children, causes developmental delays and behavioral issues with lifelong consequences. Meanwhile, access to parks and natural spaces promotes physical activity and mental well-being. Local health departments are crucial in environmental health efforts, but the defunding of the Local Environmental Protection Program (LEPP) in 2012 has weakened these initiatives. To protect public health across Kansas, we advocate for sustainable practices, energy efficiency, and responsible land management - balancing economic growth with preservation to enhance community health and environmental vitality.

Resilient Communities. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) significantly impact public health, increasing the risk of chronic diseases, mental health disorders, and risky behaviors throughout life. Higher ACEs scores are linked to conditions like heart disease, diabetes, depression, and substance abuse. ACEs also contribute to risky behaviors such as violence and addiction, which worsen health outcomes and strain public resources. These experiences often hinder academic and economic success, perpetuating cycles of poverty and poor health across generations. ACEs also drive-up healthcare costs and demand for social services. Local health departments support implementation of policies for early intervention, trauma-informed care, and supportive environments which are essential to mitigating the long-term effects of ACEs and improving public health.

Reliable Access to Nutritional Food. Proper nutrition is essential for promoting long-term health. We support state and federal funding for programs that help low-income families meet their nutritional needs and reduce hunger. By ensuring families and children have reliable access to nutritious food, we can promote better long-term health outcomes and strengthen Kansas communities. Access to free and reduced-cost school meals is crucial for Kansas children, as it improves their health, attendance, academic performance, and behavior. We also support full funding of the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program, including the breastfeeding peer counselor program, electronic benefits model, and fresh fruit and vegetable support, as well as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Dental Care and Fluoridation. Expanding access to dental care and continuing water fluoridation is crucial for improving overall public health. Access to dental care is essential because untreated dental problems, such as cavities and gum disease, can lead to severe infections, chronic pain, and even cardiovascular disease, all of which can significantly impact individuals' overall health and well-being. Additionally, we advocate for the preservation of community water fluoridation in Kansas, a proven, cost-effective measure to reduce tooth decay. Fluoridated water has been recognized as one of the most successful public health interventions, particularly for children and low-income populations who may have limited access to regular dental care. By preventing tooth decay, community fluoridation helps lower healthcare costs, reduces the need for more complex and expensive treatments, and improves the overall health of the population.

¹ [allstatesummaries-ahr23.pdf \(americashealthrankings.org\)](#)

² Population data sourced from [US States - Ranked by Population 2024 \(worldpopulationreview.com\)](#) and per state spending from [2024-PublicHealthFunding-FINAL.pdf \(tfah.org\)](#) to calculate per capita spending using the 2023 data from both sources.

³ The Docking Institute of Public Affairs, Fort Hays State University - Kansas Speaks Fall 2023 Statewide Public Opinion Survey [TITLE](#)

⁴ [Statewide poll on Medicaid expansion - Sunflower Foundation](#)

⁵ [Universal Healthcare Pros and Cons \(procon.org\)](#)